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Piers Plowman: Langland's Use of the Bible

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF Master of Arts

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Piers Plowman: Langland's Use of the Bible submitted by Terry Butler in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Piers Plowman criticism has generally paid little attention to one of the most notable features of the poem, the use of the Bible. Most critics who have concerned themselves with it have been content to count references, and not to weigh them. Failure to pay attention to the Biblical allusions has caused misinterpretation of major scenes, notably the pardon scene.

A survey of particular events in the poem where the Biblical context is important shows the range and variety of ways that Langland uses the Bible. In these cases, Piers Plowman is compared to other fourteenth-century English works which use the Bible, to make clear Langland's distinctive achievement. The way a character in Piers Plowman uses the Bible is an index of his authority and status. Certain key scriptural texts run as a thematic thread throughout the poem.

The use of scripture in Piers Plowman must also be seen in light of the theory of Biblical interpretation. The tradition from Augustine down to Langland's day is briefly reviewed to place Piers Plowman in its context. A figural (rather than allegorical) approach governs Langland's treatment of his scriptural materials.

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I. Introduction

> "There is no doubt that the Bible, whether directly or indirectly, is the greatest single influence upon our author. His whole thought is pervaded by the Vulgate, and he quotes literally, if sometimes inexactly, from that source."[1]

No complete analysis of Piers Plowman can ignore the scriptural aspects of the poem. But, surprisingly, no critical work has yet attempted to evaluate this important element in its context. The context can reasonably be defined as other works of fourteenth-century English literature which use the Bible, and the theories of Biblical explication that had evolved up to that time. By contrasting Piers Plowman with current practice in Langland's day, and comparing it to long-established theory, Langland's distinctive achievement comes clearly into focus.

Chapter 3 surveys Piers Plowman criticism which has discussed Langland and the Bible. Its strength has been explication of individual scriptural quotations; its persistent failure has been to count quotations rather than to refer them to the content of the poem.

Chapter 4 attempts to remedy this by highlighting particular events in Piers Plowman that are interesting for their use of Biblical materials. Scriptural quotation is a guide to the reader and a frame of reference for the characters. Langland uses scripture as an inspiration for the creation of incident and characters; he takes the theme

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[1] Morton W. Bloomfield, "The Present State of Piers Plowman Studies," in Blanch, Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman (University of Tennessee, 1969), page 20.

a step further when he creates characters and events that represent the Bible and the ways it can be used. The Bible is a source of authority, and finally judgement, for the issues raised in the poem.

Chapter 5 touches on the theory of Biblical exegesis. Langland concurs with theologians who present the Bible as the supreme source of authority and imitation for the Christian life. The vexed question of allegory in Piers Plowman is answered when we see that allegorical reading takes an important though minor place in Biblical interpretation.

Chapter 6 returns to Langland's literary milieu, and views Piers Plowman together with contemporary commentary, sermon, homily, and alliterative romance. Langland's use of the Bible owes less to genre than to a distinctive theory of scriptural dominance. The author of Diues and Pauper[2] may be closest to Langland's technique of Biblical quotation and allusion.

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[2] "A Dialogue Called Holy Pouert", in Diues and Pauper, edited by Priscilla Barnum (Early English Text Society OS 275, 1976), 51-69.

II. Texts, Abbreviations, and Conventions

My base text is the B-text of Skeat's two-volume edition of Piers Plowman, published in 1886[3]. It has a wealth of notes, and has been used by the majority of critics, even since the publication of the Athlone Press edition[4]. For the Prologue and Passus 1 to 7, I made use of the notes in Bennett's text[5]. Line references are in the form 6.77-78, indicating Passus 6, lines 77 to 78 ("pr" is the Prologue).

In other texts, I follow the editorial usage as to 'thorn' (lower case þ , upper case Þ) and 'yogh' (ȝ). Some phonetic or orthographic distinctions (such as italics for letters expanded from manuscript abbreviations) have not been copied from the source texts.

On the next page I give a full description of the abbreviations I use for the books of the Bible.

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[3] Piers Plowman, edited Walter W. Skeat (Oxford:Clarendon, 1886), volume 2.
[4] Piers Plowman: The B Version, edited by George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (London:Athlone Press, 1972).
[5] Piers Plowman: The Prologue and Passus I to VII of the B Text, edited J. A. W. Bennett (Oxford:Clarendon, 1972).

OLD TESTAMENT

GEN	Genesis
EX	Exodus
LEV	Leviticus
NUM	Numbers
DEUT	Deuteronomy
JOS	Joshua
JUDG	Judges
RUTH	Ruth
1 REGUM	1 Samuel
2 REGUM	2 Samuel
3 REGUM	1 Kings
4 REGUM	2 Kings
1 CHRON	1 Chronicles
2 CHRON	2 Chronicles
EZRA	Ezra
NEH	Nehemiah
TOBIT	Tobit
JUDITH	Judith
ESTHER	Esther
JOB	Job
PSALM	Psalms
PROV	Proverbs
ECCLES	Ecclesiastes
CANT	Song of Songs
WIS	Wisdom
ECCLUS	Ecclesiasticus
ISA	Isaiah
JER	Jeremiah
LAM	Lamentations
BARUCH	Baruch
EZEK	Ezechiel
DAN	Daniel
HOSEA	Hosea
JOEL	Joel
AMOS	Amos
OBD	Obadiah
JONAH	Jonah
MICAH	Micah
NAHUM	Nahum
HABK	Habakkuk
ZEPH	Zephaniah
HAG	Haggai
ZECH	Zechariah
MAL	Malachi
1 MACC	1 Maccabees
2 MACC	2 Maccabees

NEW TESTAMENT

MATT	Matthew
MARK	Mark
LUC	Luke
JOHN	John
ACTS	Acts of the Apostles
ROM	Romans
1 COR	1 Corinthians
2 COR	2 Corinthians
GAL	Galatians
EPH	Ephesians
PHILIPP	Philippians
COLOS	Colossians
1 THESS	1 Thessalonians
2 THESS	2 Thessalonians
1 TIM	1 Timothy
2 TIM	2 Timothy
TITUS	Titus
PHILEM	Philemon
HEB	Hebrews
JAMES	James
1 PETER	1 Peter
2 PETER	2 Peter
1 JOHN	1 John
2 JOHN	2 John
3 JOHN	3 John
JUDE	Jude
APOC	Revelation

The Forshall and Madden edition of the fourteenth-century English Bible refers to Acts as Deeds of the Apostles.

I have tried to keep abbreviations to a minimum, but a few seemed too tempting to resist. OT is Old Testament, NT New Testament, FM stands for Forshall and Madden's text of the Later Version of the fourteenth-century English Bible, either as originally published[6] or as accurately reprinted in part by Skeat[7].

Not all Bibles are divided into chapter and verse in quite the same manner; I made my references tally with the verse division given in Forshall and Madden's edition. The numbering of the Psalms in my study follows the Vulgate (as does FM), and so Psalm 9 is double-numbered; an asterisk indicates the second numbering (PSALM 9:7*). In giving line numbers from Piers Plowman, it was sometimes difficult to pin down a Biblical allusion to a particular line or give the terminus of an extended allusion. Parallel passages in the Bible (notably the Synoptic Gospels and the verses of the New Testament which quote the Old) cause further difficulty when trying to attribute a Biblical quotation. When comparing my results with those of other critics, a small latitude (in line numbers in Piers Plowman and chapter

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[6] The Holy Bible, in the Earliest English Versions made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his followers, edited Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden (Oxford University Press, 1850).

[7] The New Testament in English According to the Version by John Wycliffe, edited Walter W. Skeat (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1879); The Books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, edited by Walter W. Skeat (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1881).

and verse of the Bible) should be allowed.

No one has come up with clear guidelines on what constitutes a Biblical quotation or allusion. I restricted myself to places where Langland's choice of image or word owed something to the Vulgate or could be seen to be under the shaping influence of the Bible when compared to the PM translation. I did not try to group or statistically analyze Langland's quotations; I plan to let the evidence of the context in each case speak for itself. But the question of total quantity of quotation is perhaps interesting. In researching this thesis, I tabulated and verified 816 scriptural quotations and allusions in Piers Plowman. There are at least another 200 "doubtful cases" which generosity could have persuaded me to include[8]. It could be fairly said, I think, that Langland quotes the Latin Bible (and translates or paraphrases the quotation) 300 times in his 7241 line poem[9], and at least 2000 of those lines have a reference to scripture as part of their meaning.

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[8] Anne Fuller, "Scripture in Piers Plowman B," Medieval Studies, 23 (1961), 352-362, found 970 quotations and allusions. I have found over a hundred which she did not include.

[9] Greta Hort, Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought (London:SPCK, n.d.), restricted herself to the full-line Latin quotations in the work, and found 301 Bible quotations. Her results have been slightly modified by Robert Adams, "Langland and the Liturgy Revisited," Studies in Philology, 73 (1976), 266-284; and Anne Fuller, "Scripture in Piers Plowman B".

III. Critical Survey

Because Bible quotation and allusion play a prominent role in Piers Plowman, scholarly appreciation of the poem has included several attempts to evaluate and discuss its contribution.

Skeat's edition of the poem printed for the Early English Text Society included a table of Quotations Made by the Author, the bulk of which were listed under Part A "Quotations from the Bible"[10]. In his notes to the edition of Piers Plowman printed by the Clarendon Press in 1886, most of these Biblical indentifications were repeated, and in some cases the Latin quotations were translated[11].

Skeat's identifications were amplified and reprinted in Dorothy Chadwick's book Social Life in the Days of Piers Plowman[12]. An attempt was made there to classify the references to scripture as direct quotations, allusions, and less clear cut cases of "Biblical context".

Greta Hort's book[13] discussed a possible liturgical medium for Langland's use of the Vulgate. An appendix gave a list of the Latin Biblical quotations in Piers Plowman, plus possible sources in the Breviary and Missal for this material. In discussing these quotations, Miss Hort

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[10] Piers Plowman, edited Walter W. Skeat (Early English Text Society OS 67, 1885), 503-508.
[11] Piers Plowman, edited Walter W. Skeat (Oxford:Clarendon, 1886), volume 2.
[12] Dorothy Chadwick, Social Life in the Days of Piers Plowman (London, 1923), 106-111.
[13] Greta Hort, Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religous Thought (London:SPCK, n.d.)

attempted to defend Langland from charges of ignorance or carelessness in use of the Bible.

M. Ray Adams in a 1923 article attempted to determine

> "the author's relation to the Church as given us more or less directly in the text, but more especially as implicit in his own use of the Bible, ..."[14]

The conclusion, reached through tabulations of the material given in Chadwick's book, is that Langland was a cleric in minor orders. Part of the evidence brought forward is the relative frequency of quotation from various books of the Bible.

The tabulation of scriptural quotation in Piers Plowman was most recently done by Anne Fuller[15]. Her lists amplify both Skeat and Chadwick, make use of suggestions put forward in a number of recent studies, and correct some of Skeat's errors. The tabulation of quotations and references include both direct and indirect quotations. Fuller recognizes

> "that Langland's Biblical ideas may be derived from patristic and liturgical sources directly, and only indirectly from the Bible itself. It seems valid to suggest ultimate sources in scripture nonetheless."[16]

Fuller finds many previously undetected scriptural quotations in Piers Plowman. In my own evaluation of the use of the Bible in the poem, I was not always able to see an allusion where Fuller offered one entirely on her own

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[14] M. Ray Adams, "The Use of the Vulgate in Piers Plowman," Studies in Philology, 24 (1927), 556-566.
[15] Anne Fuller, "Scripture in Piers Plowman B," Medieval Studies, 23 (1961), 352-362.
[16] Anne Fuller, "Scripture in Piers Plowman B," page 352, footnote.

initiative. But in the collection of allusions gleaned by other critics, and correction of errors in previous attempts, her article is very useful. John Alford's article "Some Unidentified Quotations in Piers Plowman"[17] detected a few more scriptural quotations.

Apart from these efforts to quantify, there has been important work done on the identification and explication of particular scriptural allusions in the poem. The articles by Adams[18], Barney[19], Hoffman[20], Kaske[21], Kellogg[22], St. Jacques[23], and Schweitzer[24] have detailed a number of complex, small scale scriptural constructs in Piers Plowman. The allusions explicated in these studies are characteristically obscure, and require reference to a patristic or liturgical context for full explanation. They provide a counterbalance to the common garden variety of quotations picked out by Hort and Skeat. Adams, while reassessing the likelihood that Langland made extensive use

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17 John Alford, "Some Unidentified Quotations in Piers Plowman," Modern Philology, 72 (1975), 390-399.
18 Robert Adams, "Langland and the Liturgy Revisited," Studies in Philology, 73 (1976), 266-284.
19 Stephen Barney, "The Plowshare of the Tongue," Medieval Studies, 35 (1973), 261-293.
20 R. L. Hoffman, "The Burning of 'Boke' in Piers Plowman," Modern Language Quarterly, 25 (1964), 57-65.
21 Robert Kaske, "'Ex vi transicionis' and Its Passage in Piers Plowman," JEGP, 62 (1963), 32-60; "Gigas the Giant in Piers Plowman," JEGP, 56 (1957), 177-185; "Langland's Walnut-Simile," JEGP, 58 (1959), 650-654; "The Speech of 'Book' in Piers Plowman," Anglia, 77 (1959), 117-144.
22 Alfred Kellogg, "Langland and Two Scriptural Texts," Traditio, 14 (1958), 385-398.
23 Raymond St. Jacques, "The Liturgical Associations of Langland's Samaritan," Traditio, 25 (1969), 217-230.
24 Edward Schweitzer, "'Half a laumpe lyne in Latyne' and Patience's Riddle in Piers Plowman," JEGP, 73 (1974), 313-327.

of the liturgy, commented

> "Contrary to my previous impressions, a close study of Langland's use of scripture has demonstrated to me how often he uses them for very literal and sometimes banal purposes."[25]

But figurative and richly obscure scriptural allusions also exist. After explicating one of the most complex and involute passages in Piers Plowman, R. E. Kaske suggested

> "the intellectual texture of the poem may be much more complex, and much more dependent on learned allusion, than some of us are yet ready to admit."[26]

It will be part of my task to adjudicate between these two impressions, and to bring forward evidence that will allow us to recognize that the two statements are compatible.

Two book-length studies on Piers Plowman have discussed the extent and nature of Biblical quotation. Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition[27], by D. W. Robertson and Bernard Huppé, is the most notable. It is not necessary to provide yet another negative review of this book[28]. The book fails to convince because it tackles too much: a full scale explication of the scriptural associations and meanings of the poem. Without the kind of careful, close reading performed by scholars working on single passages of the poem, the criticism becomes general, vague, and detached from the text of the poem. The book does not provide very

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[25] Robert Adams, "Langland and the Liturgy Revisited," Studies in Philology, 73 (1976), page 280.
[26] Robert Kaske, "'Ex vi transicionis' and Its Passage in Piers Plowman," JEGP, 62 (1963), page 55.
[27] D. W. Robertson, Jr., and Bernard Huppé, Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition (Princeton University Press, 1951).
[28] See that of Morton Bloomfield, Speculum, 27 (1952), 245-249.

much concrete evidence about the way Langland uses scripture.

Ben H. Smith steers a wiser course[29]. He draws out the Biblical resonances and hidden allusions in several passages of the poem. His study does not approach the use of the Bible in a coherent way, and it is not able to tell us anything conclusive about this topic, but I have been able to make use of some of the material which Smith has gleaned.

The critical work which is the closest to what I am attempting in this dissertation is John Alford's Ph. D. dissertation, Piers Plowman and the Tradition of Biblical Imitatio[30]. Alford refers Piers Plowman and its scriptural content to a variation of the classical genre of imitatio, which he dubs "Biblical imitatio". He argues that imitation was an established form of literary education and composition in the classical Latin period, and that the use of the Bible among some medieval authors follows similar conventions. The intimacy of Biblical allusion and quotation in authors like Richard Rolle and St. Gregory is credited to the theory and practice of Biblical imitatio.

The Biblical quotations from Piers Plowman are grouped under several heads: allusion, paraphrase, and "scriptural reasoning":

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[29] Ben Smith, Jr., Traditional Imagery of Charity in Piers Plowman (The Hague:Mouton, 1966).
[30] John Alford, Piers Plowman and the Tradition of Biblical Imitatio (Ph.D. dissertation, North Carolina, 1970).

> "The object throughout these chapters is to demonstrate, in various ways, Langland's reliance on Scripture as an aid to composition."[31]

As a group, these studies show some persistent blind spots and some plain inadequacies. First, all the Biblical material is referred to the poet, Langland; that Piers Plowman is a dramatic poem has been overlooked. The various characters who speak use the Bible in different ways. I will show that the way a character in Piers Plowman uses scripture is a index to his authority and importance. Second, the discussion of the use of the Bible in the poem has gone on without reference to some important witnesses: Dame Study, Scripture, and Boke. The appearance of these characters weaves the issue of scriptural authority into the fabric of the poem. A look at the way these "inside experts" use scripture will be quite informative. Third, a few key Bible texts provide a thematic thread that runs through Piers Plowman. By following it we will be able to see the method by which ideas are developed in the poem.

Last, and most important, we must find the literary context for the use of scripture in Piers Plowman. Counting verses does no good if we do not know if 300 quotations from the Vulgate is many or few. This means we must answer the question, what type of poem is Piers Plowman, and how are its aims and effects similar to and different from other literary enterprises? In answering this question I took my lead from several critics who have tried to understand the

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31 John Alford, Biblical Imitatio, page ix.

poem in light of its contemporary literary traditions. Owst's studies of sermon literature show the contacts and similarities between those works and Piers Plowman. Owst's epitome, that Piers Plowman

> "represents nothing more nor less than the quintessence of English medieval preaching gathered up into a single metrical piece of unusual charm and vivacity ...."[32]

has been repeated in subsequent criticism, and usually dismissed. Owst's insight is valid though; Piers Plowman does share common themes with the sermons. My discussion of sermons will show to what extent I am able to vindicate Owst's assertion. Elizabeth Salter evaluates a number of traditions[33], and concludes the message of the mystics is most congenial to Langland. Most recently, Bennett's notes to his edition of Piers Plowman[34] give detailed evidence that Langland's use of alliterative conventions is selective, and part of a conscious artistry which draws on many current literary themes.

I will follow the lead offered by these critics in using the literature of the English fourteenth-century as the foil for Langland's jewel. I will use works from several traditions: alliterative romance, sermons, meditations, and Bible commentaries. The single point of

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[32] G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (Cambridge University Press, 1933), page 549, quoting his own Preaching in Medieval England (Cambridge University Press, 1920), page 295.

[33] Elizabeth Salter, Piers Plowman: An Introduction (Oxford:Basil Blackwell, 1962).

[34] Piers Plowman: The Prologue and Passus I to VII of the B Text, edited J. A. W. Bennett (Oxford:Clarendon, 1972).

comparison is how the use of scripture is similar or dissimilar to its use in Piers Plowman. My focus is Piers Plowman, and these other works are to be the focussing lenses.

I must note that in reading Middle English literature I was not struck (as some critics have been) by lack of interest or ability in these "lesser lights". Works like Dives and Pauper or Handlyng Synne are not 'sub-literary', nor fit meat only for the social or religious historian. I want to emphasize that in discussing these works along with Piers Plowman I feel I am talking about good literature and great literature, respectively. It would be a valid enterprise to turn the tables and make any of these works the subject of literary investigation.

In its use of the the Bible, Piers Plowman shares a common heritage with other Christian literature. By closely studying Langland's use of scripture and comparing it with other works of similar aims and methods, I hope to articulate the widely felt impression that Piers Plowman possesses a density and energy that distinguishes great poetry.

IV. Scripture in Piers Plowman

A. The Teaching of Holicherche

The proper use of the Bible is a main issue in Piers Plowman. Relating his vision of society which opens the poem, Wille reports

> I fonde there freris • alle the foure ordres,
> Preched the peple • for profit of hem-seluen,
> Glosed the gospel • as hem good lyked,
> For coueitise of copis • construed it as thei wolde.
>
> pr.58-61

At the beginning of the poem, the question of right interpretation of scripture is opened. I will look carefully at some parts of the poem in which this theme is significant, and show that keeping it in mind will help us explain some passages more adequately than previous critics have been able to.

The greatest problem facing the society mirrored in the field full of folk in the Prologue is lack of leadership and authority. The king in council has abundant advisors; a lunatik, a goliardeys, an angel, and the commons all have their say. But what is spoken is in need of elaboration: the lunatik is cryptic, and the other three speak in Latin, "construe ho-so wolde" (pr.144).

The magnificent and puzzling vision itself needs explanation, but Wille is reticent (pr.209-210), and the Prologue closes in cacophony. With the entry of Holicherche in Passus 1, the purpose behind Wille's vision becomes clear. She holds the key to the meaning of the events and

symbols that swirled about Wille, and when he requests an explanation with suitable humility, she obliges him. From her opening words, which question Wille's sleep in terms of spiritual torpor, to her final leave-taking, Holicherche presents a second level of reference to the words and symbols of the Prologue. Her exposition condenses LUC 6:23-24 and establishes a basic divison, a separation into two groups, which dives beneath the confused variety of Wille's vision.

> The moste partie of this poeple • that passeth on this erthe,
> Haue thei worschip in this worlde • thei wilne no better;
> Of other heuene than here • holde thei no tale.' 1.6-8

Her short speech includes the exemplum of Lot (1.27-34) and a paraphrase of the gospel text MATT 22:21 "Reditte Cesari" to answer Wille's question about wealth (1.46-53). The 'castel of care' is explained by a capsule history of Satan and his victims: Adam and Eve, Cain, and Judas. Creation is divided into two groups, one following Satan (1.110-117), the other following Christ.

Wille responds to the poise of his impressive interlocuter, and asks her (1.84) "How may I save my soule ...?" Wille's question is scriptural (it paraphrases LUC 18:18 and JOHN 6:28), and Holicherche's answer, with its Biblical associations, becomes the theme text for the rest of the poem. Man is created in God's likeness (1.88-91, quoting LUC 6:36, FM, "Therfor be ȝe merciful, as ȝoure fadir is merciful.") His life is a charge to recreate the

image of God[35] in himself (1.128-131, quoting JOHN 5:29). God's love for man is manifest in his gift of Christ. Christ is introduced as healing, saving, redeeming medicine for man, using both Old and New Testament allusions as support for the image[36]. Man is made to love God, and serve him through works of love (1.164-165, quoting JAMES 2:26).

In answering Wille's puzzlement, Holicherche has shown the full range of the application of the Bible. It is a source of historical incident and a storehouse of religious authority. It is the background to all the issues that the dreamer explores, both spiritual and social. It is also a mysterious recess for the moving imagery that points to Christ. Holicherche concludes:

For-thi I sey as I seide • ere by the textis,
Whan alle tresores ben ytryed • treuthe is the beste.
1.204-205

Wille's quest is unquestionably the impetus for the poem; and Holicherche's teaching shapes that quest and sets it in a landscape of scriptural reference and allusion. The motif of a scripturally informed description of words and things will recur throughout the poem.

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[35] The best explanation of this central theme in the poem is given by Barbara Raw, "Piers and the Image of God in Man," in Hussey, Critical Approaches to Piers Plowman, 143-179.
[36] Ben Smith, Jr., Traditional Imagery of Charity in Piers Plowman (The Hague:Mouton, 1966), 20-40.

B. Lady Mede

We see in Passus 3 that the Bible is not exclusively the domain of Holicherche and her followers. Conscience and Lady Mede debate the right meaning of the concept 'mede'. Conscience explains 'mede' as God's reward to those "that wel worchen whil thei ben here" (3.232). He defines 'mede' by repetition of the word in the context of scriptural quotation (using PSALM 25:10 and JOB 15:34 at 3.93-99). Conscience then takes 1 REGUM 15:3 as his lesson, and incorporates the word 'mede' into his paraphrase of the story of Amelec (3.261-270), a representative of false meed and greed. The definition of 'mede' as reward for pleasing God reaches a note of finality with Conscience's apocalyptic interpretation of ISA 2:4 (3.306 and 3.322), and of PROV 22:1 (3.327). These quotations (to Lady Mede's discomfort) herald a reign of faith and selflessness. Lady Mede, in a desperate plunge of ignorance, tries to buoy up her case with a quotation from the Bible.

Also wroth as the wynde • wex Mede in a while,
'I can no Latyn,' quod she • 'clerkis wote the sothe.
Se what Salamon seith • in Sapience bokes,
That hij that ȝiueth ȝiftes • the victorie wynneth,
And moche worschip had ther-with • as holiwryt telleth,
Honorem adquiret qui dat munera, etc.' 3.328-332

Her ignorance of Latin is indicative of a larger inadequacy; she is ignorant of the Bible's teaching on 'mede', as well as ignorant of her own proper name and nature, munera, and its traditional interpretation.

Conscience scorns Mede's critical powers. First, the text reminds him of a quotation she should tremble to hear:

But preue ȝe alle thingis, and holde ȝe that thing that is good. (1 THESS 5:21, FM, quoted at 3.333, 339)

Then he corrects her translation, for she has quoted only the first part of the verse. The conclusion is "a ful teneful tixte to hem that taketh mede":

He that ȝyueth ȝiftis, schal gete victorie and onour; forsothe he takith awei the soule of the takeris. (PROV 22:9, FM, quoted at 3.345)

Notice the scriptural scholarship of Conscience: Mede's attenuated quotation put him in mind of another quotation in which the meaning reverses when the conclusion is added. (Mede lost the round with Conscience on moral grounds, but she proved a more prophetic textual critic; the second half of this verse in Proverbs did not survive into modern versions or translations[37]).

C. Resoun's Sermon

Lady Mede's misuse of scripture contributes to the dimming of the imperative Wille received in Passus 1. The fruitless legal wranglings of Passus 2 to 4 blur the distinctions supplied by Holicherche. The appearance of Resoun is needed to help the king make his ruling on Lady Mede. Resoun's arguments are persuasive, although the danger of misinterpretation is still ever-present.

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[37] The textual note was pointed out by Mary Smyth, Biblical Quotation in Middle English Literature Before 1350 (Folcraft, 1974), lxix - lxx.

Late ȝowre confessoure, sire kynge • construe this vnglosed;
* * *
Clerkes that were confessoures • coupled hem togideres,
Alle to construe this clause • and for the kynges profit,
Ac nouȝte for conforte of the comune • ne for the kynges soule. 4.145, 149-151

Resoun's sermon and the confessions that follow in Passus 5 attempt to bring Resoun's effective mediation to the 'comune'. His sermon (5.11-62) directs contrition and repentance in its hearers, the Seven Deadly Sins. But their intention to confess is deflected as their sinful nature asserts itself, and their confessions become ironic proof of their inability to confess. The intensity of this irony increases from Proude-herte and Lecchoure (who are given short shrift), to the ambivalent repentance of Enuye and Wratthe, to the ludicrous performance of Glotoun and Sleuthe. When we notice the perversion of Biblical language in the passage, we can see that Langland's purpose is consistent throughout, and that Enuye and Wratthe are ironical in subtle and latent ways, whereas Glottony (appropriately) goes whole hog.

Enuye takes Paul's admonition in 2 COR 12:20 for imitation a rebours:

lest perauenture stryuyngis, enuyes, sturdynesses, dissenciouns and detraccions, preuy spechis of discord, bolnyngis bi pride, debatis ben among ȝou; (2 COR 12:20, FM)

Bitwene many and many • I make debate ofte,
* * *
With bakbitynge and bismer • and berynge of fals witnesse;
This was al his curteisye • where that euere he shewed hym. 5.98, 89-90

Enuye, instead of subduing his selfishness, is vengeful and self-destructive.

And wryngynge he ȝede with the fiste • to wreke hymself he thouȝte 5.85

The sermon "In novitate vite ambulemus"[38] describes envy in the same fashion. The use of scripture in this sermon can be compared quite closely to Piers Plowman. The text of the sermon is taken from ROM 6:4 (FM) "walke we in a newnesse of lijf". There are four levels or walks of life: the Commandments, Righteousness, "Sothfastnes", and last:

the best and the hyest of all, ... For Cryste hym-selfe is this waye, bothe lyfe and trewth: (page 299, lines 13, 15-16)

The sin of envy is the block to the fourth walk. The envious are described:

And so wyth backbytyng, lesynge and myssaws they distroyn theyre neghbours name in all that they kan. (page 300, lines 28-39)
* * *
gladly wold harme hym-self to hynder that other. (page 301, lines 4-5)

There are similarities with Piers Plowman in both detail and overall structure. Later in Passus 5 Piers will lead the pilgrims through the Ten Commandments and right-living (5.570-593) "for to wende with hem to Treuthes dwellyng place" (5.564). The same Pauline imagery is behind both descriptions of envy. The difference comes in the treatment of how sin hinders man from following Christ, and how the hindrance is overcome.

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[38] "In novitate vite ambulemus", Middle English Sermons, number 45, edited by Woodburn Ross (Early English Text Society OS 209, 1940), 297-301.

In the sermon, the schematic structure of the text is used to bring out a contrast between sin and salvation. Each of the four 'heads' of the walk of life are paralleled by characteristic aspects of the sin. Each division is introduced and defended by a reference to scripture[39]. The four walks are explained with quotations from the Psalms, and Enuye's manifestions (in "demyng", "worde" and "dede") are supported by scriptural quotation.

In Piers Plowman sin and salvation are brought together by an ironic and allusive use of the Bible. Enuye's self-hatred is selfish, according to the teaching of both Holicherche and Resoun, for man's life is a gift from God, demanding repayment of duty and obedience. Enuye's denial of that gift is heightened when he complains

That al my body bolneth • for bitter of my galle.
* * *
May no sugre ne swete thinge • asswage my swellynge,
Ne no diapenidion • dryue it fro myne herte,
Ne noyther schrifte ne shame • but ho-so schrape my mawe?
5.119, 122-124

The word 'bolneth' parodies Paul's warning; the words 'shrift' and 'shame' indicate Enuye's distance from grace and his inability to repent. The images of sweetness and medicine connect his unrepentance with God's gift of Christ, described earlier by Holicherche as doctor, medicine, and "triacle of heuene" (1.146).

The physical details of his agony, besides showing the

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[39] Ross' introduction to Middle English Sermons (Early English Text Society OS 209, 1940), page xlvii, explains the formal divisions of the "modern" sermon, and the use of scripture to confirm them.

distorting influence of his vice, also suggest a deeper level of scriptural allusion. Enuye's anguish mocks Christ's suffering on the Cross. The sinner complains that "his body was to-bolle for wratthe" (5.84). The phrase "for bitter of my galle" (5.119) echoes the bitter gall and vinegar offered Christ (MATT 27:34); an incident placed at the peak of Christ's sufferings in many Passion narratives. Langland uses the word 'poyson' at 18.52. Enuye's discomfort is placed in perspective by suggesting Christ's anguish at Enuye for refusing to accept His sacrifice. This use of scripture is an imitation of the central theme of 'The Complaint of Christ'. In "The Complaynt of Criste"[40] the pains of crucifixion are suffered by Christ every time man falls into sin and rejects Christ's atonement.

"Man, I loue the! whome Louyst thowe?
I am þy frende; why wolt þou feyne?
I for-yaue, and þu me slewe:
* * *
Why art thowe to þy Frende on-kynde?
vnkynde, -- for thowe kyllyd thy lorde,
And euery day þouw wounedyst hym newe,
* * *
And thowe me myghttyst, as I þe maye,
wele byttyrly thowe woldyst me bynde;
I for-yaue, and þou seyest nay,
Why arte thowe to þe frende onkynde?" 49-51, 75-77, 97-100

Langland incorporates this motif with a scriptural turn of phrase. Any sympathy Enuye tries to elicit with his complaint is undercut by his ignorance of the larger context in which his sin exists.

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[40] Printed in Frederick Furnivall, Political, Religious and Love Poems (Early English Text Society OS 15, 1965), 190-214.

The depiction of Wratthe in Piers Plowman continues this ironic use of scripture. Wratthe's activities are parodies of scripture, and he is portrayed as in every way repudiating Christ. Wratthe has fashioned himself an occupation out of the warning of MATT 12:33-37:

ether make ȝe the tree yuel and his fryut yuel; for a tree is knowun of the fruyt. (FM)

Wratthe is a gardener who carefully cultivates this kind of tree. The results are as predicted.

'I am Wrath,' quod he • 'I was sum tyme a frere,
And the couentes gardyner • for to graffe ympes;
* * *
And now is fallen ther-of a frute • that folke han wel leuere
Schewen her schriftes to hem • than shryue hem to her persones. 5.136-137,141-142

Wratthe's world is also a parody of the study and preaching of the Gospel. He has his personal brand of books (5.147), a special type of spirituality (5.149), and offers his own gift of grace (5.152).

We can compare the implicit use of scripture in the depiction of Wratthe and Enuye to a manual of confession, Handlyng Synne[41]. The iconographic details are surprisingly similar, considering the practical purpose of the manual. Enuye "ys euer sorowful, we se with ye" (.3920) and is described in the same Pauline terms: "a nedder and a bakbytere" (.4170). But in use of the Bible to bring these characters to charity there is a great difference. Handlyng Synne uses the Bible mainly as a source of story and

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[41] Robert of Brunne, Handlyng Synne, (Early English Text Society OS 119, 1901; OS 123, 1903).

anecdote. In its treatment of the Seven Deadly Sins, a series of narratives which highlight each sin are told. The Bible, as well as secular history and collections of legends, is a source of these stories. For Enuye, the Bible provides the stories of Judas (.4195-4198), Salamon (.4182), and Absalon (.4207).

Langland's treatment of sin in Passus 5 includes in its irony manuals like Handlyng Synne, which give step by step instructions as to the questions to be asked sinners in confession and repentance. Langland shows sin separated from repentance by a chasm of language. Repentance's interrogation of the sins owes a great deal to the form of questioning advocated in the confessional handbooks[42]. But Enuye characteristically misinterprets Repentance's questions to him. Asked if he is contrite, he replies:

'I am sori,' quod that segge • 'I am but selde other,' 5.127

Couetise epitomises this aspect of sin; he has a chronic inability to understand the language of repentance.

'Repentedestow the euere,' quod Repentance • 'ne
restitucioun madest?'
'Yus, ones I was herberwed,' quod he • 'with an hep of
chapmen;
I roos whan thei were arest • and yrifled here males.'
'That was no restitucioun', quod Repentance • 'but a
robberes thefte,' 5.232-235

The idiolect in which Enuye and Couetise are trapped is not penetrable by the question and answer technique of Handlyng Synne.

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[42] Bennett's notes to Passus 5 give ample references and analogues from the confessional literature.

The Biblical quotations supply the only common ground between Repentance and the Sins. Even as they pervert and repudiate these texts, Couetise and his fellows are defined by them. Repentance bridges the chasm by describing God as Love which willingly shares sin's limitations to offer sin the chance to free itself from them. Repentance succeeds because he uses language native to sin, and punningly redefines it in Christian terms.

For thourgh that synne thi sone • sent was to this erthe,
And bicam man of mayde • manknyde to saue,
And madest thi-self with thi sone • and vs synful yliche,
* * *
And sith with thi self sone • in owre sute deydest 5.492-495

At 5.494, matching quotations from the Old and New Testaments are offered. God's first intention is for man to be like God (GEN 1:26); and He is willing to intervene (through Christ) to ensure it, if man will respond in kind:

God is charite, and he that dwellith in charite, dwellith in God, and God in hym. (1 JOHN 4:16, FM)

The way God reaches out to man is also indicated by the ambiguous word 'sute' at 5.495: God has acted in man's guise as well as on his behalf.

Repentance uses terms from sin's vocabulary to explain this divine initiative. Repentance advises Couetise to take his ill-gotten gains to the bishop:

'For he shal answere for the • at the heygh dome,
For the and for many mo • that man shal ȝif a rekenynge.
What he lerned ȝow in lente • leue thow none other,
And what he lent ȝow of owre lordes good • to lette ȝow fro synne.' 5.300-303

He plays on double meanings of 'lent', 'good', 'leue' and 'lette'. Couetise's customary trade talk is redefined by an

allusion to two gospel texts:

Therfor ȝelde ȝe to the emperoure tho thingis that ben the emperouris, and to God tho thingis that ben of God. (MATT 22:21, FM)

For as a man that goith in pilgrimage, clepide hise seruauntis, and bitook to hem hise godis; (MATT 25:14, FM)

D. Piers' Pardon

Throughout the Visio there has been reference to text, theme, glossing, translating, and explaining. Scripture has been used and misused, but always returns to provide the measure for the characters Wille meets. If we neglect this procedure of deference to scripture, the need for explanation and translation, the double meaning of words and concepts, we are in danger of mistaking the meaning of the turning point of the poem, the pardon scene. This scene is crucial, for it introduces our main character (Piers as Plowman), it tumbles Wille into the poem as dreamer/actor, and it initiates the particular quests (for definition of Do-best, for Piers, for salvation) which we share with Wille to the end of the poem and beyond. It is with the pardon scene, and what comes of it, that Wille becomes fully that living pun, willful man, a man with Will, seeking his salvation. Structurally, both B and C text manuscript notation and the fact of a truncated A text indicate that a major fault line occurs here.

I have emphasized these external and descriptive markers because I do not believe the action of Passus 7 will

bear the thematic baggage which has been loaded on it by its previous interpreters. In an attempt to find satisfactory grounds for the major redirection of the poem which occurs here, the pardon scene has been misinterpreted; overinterpreted might be a better word.

The critical problem is first, how to understand the text (which is a quotation from the Athanasian Creed), as a pardon; and next, to make intelligible Piers' reaction to it. The most usual solution has been to declare the pardon to be no pardon at all until Piers tears it. According to Coghill the scene created problems for the poet that only a new poem (the B text) could solve:

> "it was the Pardon and his ponderings on it that in the end forced the revising poet to recast the whole work."[43]

But his interpretation creates part of the problem. The history of the "meddling priest" in the scene begins here.

> "The priest denies it was a pardon at all and Piers tears it up in mystification ...."[44]

D. W. Robertson ventures

> "Under the old law, which Piers Plowman tears in half to the astonishment of literary historians, salvation was not possible."[45]

Astonishment, indeed, that a verse quoted from the Athanasian Creed represents the Old Law, or that Piers' tearing creates the pardon. For John Lawlor the pardon

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[43] Nevill Coghill, "The Pardon of Piers Plowman," Proceedings of the British Academy, 30 (1944), page 317.
[44] Nevill Coghill, "The Pardon of Piers Plowman," page 317.
[45] D. W. Robertson, Jr., "Historical Criticism," English Institute Essays, (1950), page 5.

"shows the need of Mercy; the pardon is condemnatory"[46]. Rosemary Woolf[47] summarizes all significant attempts to explain the scene; she also concludes that the pardon condemns. Her evidence includes glosses on this verse of the creed which refer it to the Last Judgement. For her, the Pardon becomes "a pardon after Piers had torn it"[48]. She says

> "the priest asks to see the pardon and then dismisses its worth in the condescending manner and contemptuous tone of a trained theologian dealing with an ignorant layman."[49]

The fatal problem with this interpretation is that Piers at this stage lacks the authority to make a tearing of the paper convincing as a pardon for mankind. It also involves the invention of a supercilious priest to be Piers' dupe; he is a phantom of literary criticism which needs to be laid to rest. Reference to the scriptural context built into the scene will allow us to see that the pardon, not Piers, has the requisite authority; and what the priest does and what Piers says are important, not the other way around.

The validity of pardons has been in question from the beginning of the poem (pr.68-72). As well, the larger issue of interpretation and 'glossing' of entitling documents is familiar to us. There is no reason for surprise when a text based on the Bible finds an accurate interpeter, and is then

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[46] John Lawlor, "The Pardon Reconsidered," Modern Language Review, 45 (1930), 449-458.
[47] Rosemary Woolf, "The Tearing of the Pardon," in Hussey, Critical Approaches to Piers Plowman, 50-75.
[48] Rosemary Woolf, "The Tearing of the Pardon," page 70.
[49] Rosemary Woolf, "The Tearing of the Pardon," page 73.

put into practice. This is what happens in Passus 7.

The encounter between Piers and Hunger in Passus 6 prepares us for Piers' reaction to the pardon. His anger at wasters and ne'er-do-well's is characteristic:

'Now, by the peril of my soule!', quod Pieres • al in pure tene, 6.119

The choice of words here echoes his tearing the pardon "for pure tene" (7.116). His anger is moral outrage, as the word 'pure' suggests[50]. But his call to Hunger to "a-wreke me of thise wastoures" (6.175) is too hasty; he quickly regrets it and wishes Hunger to be gone. The results do not accord with either Treuthe's or Love's teaching:

'They are my blody brethren,' quod Pieres • 'for God bouȝte vs alle;
Treuthe tauȝte me ones • to loue hem vchone,' 6.210-211

Hunger responds (somewhat out of character perhaps) with an amplification on this theme of love, and the need both to work and to be generous to all. His teaching is based on scripture, as he twice mentions (6.233-234, 6.240). Piers wants to be sure the teaching he receives is of God and has His seal:

'I woulde nouȝt greue god,' quod Piers • 'for al the good on grounde;
Miȝte I synneles do as thow seist?' • seyde Piers thanne. 6.231-232

When Hunger advances several other Bible texts, Piers does as Hunger bids him.

Piers' deference to scriptural authority, his willingness to do the will of God, to spring into action, is

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[50] Alan C. Lupack, "Piers Plowman B.vii.116," Explicator, 34:Item 31, suggests this interpretation of 'pure'.

the key to the pardon scene. Piers is an anti-type to Wille, who is cautious, watching everything, but as yet doing nothing. The change that comes over Wille gradually from Passus 7 onwards, occurs in a moment for Piers when he understands the pardon from Treuthe.

The pardon is introduced with careful elaboration in the first part of Passus 7. Contrary to Rosemary Woolf, who ventures that

> "the narrative order is markedly odd, for the exposition of the pardon is given before the text of the pardon itself"[51]

the order is familiar and proper. The authority and results of the pardon come first; its credentials are displayed, and according to the standards operative so far in the poem, they are well in order. The pardon comes from Treuthe, and is sent because of Piers' initiative (7.1-5). It requires him to stay at home to "eryen his leyes" (7.5), and is contrasted with the false pardons mentioned in the Prologue (7.18-22). It requires good works of various kinds, and offers the guarantee of protection only on condition:

> And witen ȝow fro wanhope • if ȝe wil thus worche,
> And send ȝowre sowles in safte • to my seyntes in ioye.'
> 7.35-36

Instead of a pardon offered for gain, this one has effect only as the <u>recipient</u> merits. The world is again divided into two classes: the pardon benefits those who work well, but condemns those who do evil.

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[51] Rosemary Woolf, "The Tearing of the Pardon," page 53.

Its scriptural credentials are also impressive. In advance we learn it is in agreement with Christ's epitome of the OT:

what euere thinges ȝe wolen that men do to ȝou, do ȝe to hem, for this is the lawe and the prophetis. (MATT 7:12, FM, quoted at 7.61)

Other scriptural quotations emphasize reliance on God and rendering one's due.

He hath ynough that hath bred ynough • though he haue nouȝt elles: 7.86

Y siȝ not a iust man forsakun; nethir his seed sekynge breed. (PSALM 36:25, FM, quoted at 7.88)

Wille then overlooks the priest and Piers reading the pardon. The priest's offer to "construe eche clause and kenne it the on Engliche" (7.107) should not make us suspicious; we will wait to see what kind of job he does. His translation is an accurate expansion of the text.

'Peter!', quod the prest tho • 'I can no pardoun fynde,
But "Dowel, and haue wel • and god shal haue thi sowle,
And do yuel, and haue yuel • hope thow non other
But after thi ded-day • the deuel shal haue thi sowle!"'
7.112-115

The only real pardon is the pardon accorded to good works.

Piers agrees with the priest's reading of the pardon, for he puts it into action. It is unprofitable for us to puzzle over the status of his previous occupation (plowing) or to wonder about the fate of the literal piece of paper on which the pardon was written. Piers has transcended them, and given them a new meaning which he expresses with allusive references to scripture. He first quotes PSALM 22:4, a verse of consolation and confidence in God.

His reliance on God is expressed in the language of scripture quoted above; like the just man of PSALM 36:

Of preyers and of penaunce • my plow shal ben herafter, 7.119

He is also recalling PSALM 41:4:

Mi teeris weren looues to me bi dai and nyȝt; .... (FM)

Quoting MATT 6:25 he declares:

We shulde nouȝt be to bisy • aboute the worldes blisse;
Ne solliciti sitis • he seyth in the gospel, 7.125-126

There is no disagreement between Piers and the priest on the fact of the pardon, or on Piers' action because of it. Piers' impetuosity is in character; the priest is more surprised than angry with him.

'Were thow a prest, Pieres,' quod he • 'thow miȝte preche where thow sholdest,
As deuynour in deuynyte • with dixit insipiens to thi teme.' 7.135

The priest's suggestions as to Piers' potential vocation are prophetic, not irritable. The priest suggests that he might profitably preach to those who deny God (quoting PSALM 13:1-2 or PSALM 52:2). Piers replies, quoting scripture, that that these ought to be tossed out, not rescued:

Caste thou out a scornere, and strijf schal go out with hym; and causis and dispisyngis schulen ceesse. (PROV 22:10, FM, quoted at 7.137)

The dispute between justice and mercy, which is opened here so suddenly, is the guidepost of Wille's future pilgrimage. It is important to notice that at this point Piers is by no means entirely in the right; his allegiance

to the word of Treuthe is commendable, but (as in the episode with Hunger), his 'tene' must be moderated. Piers' response to the pardon achieves its purpose when it springs Wille into action. The final resolution of the issues comes much later, when Wille's quest ends with One like "some-del to Piers the Plowman" (18.10) who exemplifies God's mercy and God's judgement. The pardon is the sternest pronouncement of a beneficent God, which conceals a message of hope in its hard shell. The pardon scene is misinterpreted if it is treated as a self-sufficient scene: it is the opening step in a long exploration. It is a mistake of impatience which "solves the problem" by creating literary phantoms like Piers' ritual tearing and a "bad priest".

The misinterpretation of Piers and the priest stems from a reliance on the authorial comment at 7.138, where it is said that they "apposeden eyther other", and the later remark that the priest "impugned the pardon with two propre wordes" (7.147). These phrases do not have their modern freight of meaning. "Apposeden" is a clerical word, defined by the Middle English Dictionary as

> "to question or examine (especially about Scripture, doctrines of the Church, etc.)"

"Impugned" conveys strife and dispute, without the modern connotation of "discredit". The process of debate has been a feature of Wille's early visions, and the issue of justice and mercy, opened by the pardon and its two interpretations, will be investigated by learned debate through the rest of

the poem. Piers and the priest inaugurate the process, as well as the issue, that occupies the entire middle section of the poem (Passus 8 to 18).

The purpose of the pardon scene is to engage Wille and the reader in the concerns which will govern the remainder of the poem. Wille responds to the experience by reflecting for the first time on his own vocation, dreaming. By relying on scriptural precedent (Daniel 7.151-158 and Ioseph 7.159-166) he breaks with his previous reticence, and condemns confidence in false pardons and other documents of salvation. He speaks for the first time in that voice of authority he has long been hearing:

I sette ȝowre patentes and ȝowre pardounz • at one pies hele!
For-thi I conseille all Cristene • to crye god mercy,
7.194-195

E. Wille's Teachers

The process of debate is now Wille's route to growth, at first mental, then spiritual. We must remain aware of the conventions of debate if we are to correctly interpret the events. In Piers Plowman, the two sides of an argument are constructed tangentially, with each side establishing points which will be further refined, discussed, and resolved. Being disputatious is not a fault in this world; but there is a line between that and sheer wilfulness. Wille discovers the difference through his encounters; the key to knowledge depends upon scriptural discernment.

Like Piers, some of the debaters Wille meets seem too acrimonious. While Wille is having an interesting talk with Witte, Dame Study bursts upon them "wonderly wroth that Witte me thus tauȝte" (10.3). Her anger here is indicative of her status, not bad manners. Dame Study's anger, Holicherche's curtness, and Piers' 'tene' are all schematic means to indicate authority and command respect. This device for establishing the relative importance of the characters is familiar through Boethius' Consolatio: Dame Study is of Lady Philosophy's lineage.

Wille must retain his proper humility and deference while conversing with these commanding figures. Wille's first attempts at participation are flawed by pride and ignorance.

'Contra', quod I as a clerke • and comsed to disputen, 8.20

But as he learns respect, he begins his progress, passing from his first tutor, Thoughte, to Witte.

Thouȝte and I thus • thre days we ȝeden,
Disputyng vppon Dowel • day after other,
And ar we were ywar • with Witte gan we mete. 8.112-114

Witte's exposition includes much that is abstract, notably the Castle of Caro (9.02-58). He uses scripture to give historical body to his speech: there are references to God's creation (9.32), Judas (9.91), Cain and Eve (9.120-125), and Noah (9.126-141).

Witte is supplanted by Dame Study, who warns Wille that the use and application of knowledge are as important as its acquisition. Her use of scripture supports her judgement; her quotation is more intimate than Witte's, her use of the Bible shows more depth and variety. The books of the Bible attain individuality, and take on some character.

Iob the gentel • in his gestes witnesseth,
* * *
Ac he that hath holy writte • ay in his mouth,
* * *
And so seith the sauter • I haue yseye it ofte,
10.23, 32, 68

At first appearance, the character Scripture is undistinguished from her peers. She is clergy's wife, "sybbe to the seuene artz" (10.150); but her quotation is similar in style to her immediate predecessor, Clergye. Scripture speaks formally, using Cato and the Bible as her authorities[52]; her theme is salvation. Wille in his turn presents his thoughts on who may be saved, with apposite quotation and abundant arguments. It would appear that Wille is Scripture's equal in this discussion of salvation.

But the ground under Wille gives way at the opening of Passus 11. Wille is engulfed by sin; through scriptural allusion his life is merged with Satan's three temptations of Christ. Wille's life is squandered:

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[52] Richard Hazleton, "The Christianization of 'Cato'," Medieval Studies, 19 (1957), 157-173, shows the process of rapprochement of secular literature to the Bible resulted in Cato becoming an effective Bible epitome, however incongruous some of the material in the Disticha Catonis may have been.

Til Concupiscencia-carnis • acorded alle my werkes.
* * *
Coueityse-of-eyghes • conforted me anon after,
And folowed me fourty wynter • and a fyfte more,
11.42, 45-46

His clever arguments seem vain as in a moment he "ȝarn in-to elde" (11.59).

Wille's erudition (pridefully displayed when he argued with Scripture) is ridiculed when Lewte upbraids him, and can defend his criticism of Wille with quotation from scripture:

'ȝe, bi Peter and bi Poule', quod he • 'and take hem bothe to witnesse, 11.87

Scripture draws strength from Wille's predicament, and speaks with new authority.

'He seith sothe,' quod Scripture tho • and skipte an heigh, and preched; 11.103

Her quotation is no longer formal; Biblical allusions are now woven into her speech. Her macaronic language suggests that the Bible is as innate to her as sin and death are to Wille.

'Multi to a maungerye • and to the mete were sompned,
And whan the peple was plenere comen • the porter vnpynned the ȝate,
And plukked in pauci priueliche • and lete the remenaunt go rowme! 11.107-109

Hearing this paraphrase of MATT 22:14, Wille applies the text to himself.

Al for tene of her tyxte • trembled myn herte,
And in a were gan I waxe • and with my-self to dispute,
Whether I were chosen or nouȝt chosen; • on Holicherche I thouȝt, 11.110-112

Wille recollects Holicherche and echoes Piers' dedication

from Passus 7. Here 'tene' is the fear of God, the theme the priest thought Piers would do well to preach (7.137).

Wille has been guided from the complacent commentator of Passus 8 to a personal reflection on his own fate. As in the pardon scene, his movement from an external observer to involvement has come with the agency of scripture. Wille's teachers have returned him to the essential division of mankind introduced by Holicherche at the beginning of the poem. But Wille now has learned his own life is intimately bound up with scriptural themes and motifs.

F. Trajan

The intrusion of Trajan, with his opening comment "Yee! baw for bokes!" (11.135) appears to offer an attractive direct path to Wille's goal, and appeals to his impatience with the teachers who never give a final answer to his questions. But Trajan is part of the overriding pattern of tangential debate.

Trajan does not appear out of nowhere, but rather arrives on cue at Scripture's remark:

'That is soth,' seyde Scripture • 'may no synne lette
Mercy alle to amende • and mekenesse hir folwe,
For they beth as owre bokes telleth • aboue goddes werkes,
Misericordia eius super omnia opera eius! 11.132-134

As well as embodying this scriptural truth, Trajan uses scripture to validate his testament of love. He quotes extensively from the gospels, (for example, at 11.170, 11.211, 11.226-228 and 11.240-243, where he refers to

specific events of the Ministry). His discourse also contains the condensed scriptural figure of the 'walnot' (11.251-256), one of the most complex scriptural contexts in the poem[53].

By these criteria, Trajan is a speaker of considerable authority. However, at the same time, Wille and the reader are supposed to suspect Trajan's teaching is incomplete; a future explicator must appear who can draw distinctions Trajan leaves blurred. As Wille approaches Christ he is distracted by figures who have an out-of-the-ordinary relationship with Christ. In Passus 10 he argued against obedience because the thief on Christ's right hand:

That had lyued al his lyf • with lesynges and with thefte;
And for he biknewe on the crosse • and to Cryste schrof hym,
He was sonnere saued • than seynt Iohan the baptiste,
And or Adam and Ysaye • or eny of the prophetes, 10.415-418

Trajan is proof of God's mercy; but Wille must learn that His mercy does not compromise His justice. Wille is unaware of the special dispensation that governs the likes of Trajan and the thief; their attraction for Wille is that they appeal to his pretensions at self-sufficiency. Wille and the reader must resist taking Trajan as a prototype. Wille later learns of Trajan and the thief:

Ac though that thef had heuene • he hadde none heighe blisse,
As seynt Iohan and other seyntes • that asserued hadde bettere.
* * *
And riȝt as Troianus the trewe knyȝt • tilde nouȝt depe in helle,
That owre lorde ne had hym liȝtlich oute • so leue I the thef be in heuene. 12.196-197, 210-211

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53 Robert Kaske, "Langland's Walnut-Simile," JEGP, 58, (1959), 650-654.

G. The Life of Christ

Maclin Smith recognizes that the Life of Christ is the heart of Piers Plowman.

> "The dreamer-narrator of Piers Plowman has as his ultimate and saving experience a meditation on the life of Christ; .... "[54]

The climax of the poem is the Life of Christ in Passus 18 and 19, where Christ confronts and defeats Satan, and redeems man's soul. But earlier, in Passus 16, there is a shorter Life of Christ. By looking at the choice of scriptural incident in the two, we can see Langland modifying the conventions of the Life of Christ for his artistic purposes.

In Passus 16 Anima presents a compact life of Christ, from Annunciation (LUC 2:14, 1:26, at 16.90-91) to a summary of the Crucifixion (16.160-166). The scriptural quotations emphasize the miracles of Christ's ministry and the opposition between Him and the Jews. In Langland's paraphrase of The Cleansing of the Temple, Christ acts with an aggressive energy:

And mysseide the Iewes manliche • and manaced hem to bete,
And knokked on hem with a corde • and caste adown her stalles, 16.127-128

At 16.153-159 Langland invents a speech for Christ to Judas, based on the incident at MATT 18:7. Christ concludes it

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[54] Maclin Smith, Piers Plowman and the Tradition of the Medieval Life of Christ, (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1973), page iii.

with a command:

Thow I bi tresoun be ytake • at ȝowre owne wille,
Suffreth my postles in pays • and in pees gange.' 16.158-159

The selection and expansion of Biblical incidents serves several purposes. Christ's righteous anger with the Iewes looks forward to their (self-seeking) violence done to Him. In this narrative the Passion is only summarised (16.160-168); in Passus 18 it will be the main focus. The false taking of Jesus by Judas is a type of Satan's theft of man's soul. The victory in Passus 18 is assured by the argument that Satan's capture of man was only a temporary imprisonment, achieved through deceit and therefore invalid. The threat to Judas which Langland devises prepares us for the debate with Satan in Passus 18, as well as the result of the victory (the spread of the Gospel) taken up in Passus 19.

Continuity between the two Lives comes from the repetition of the "leeche of lyfe" imagery from Passus 1.

And Pieres the Plowman • parceyued plenere tyme,
And lered hym lechecrafte • his lyf for to saue,
* * *
And salued syke and synful • bothe blynde and crokede,
* * *
Some that the syȝte seyen • saide that tyme,
That he was leche of lyf • and lorde of heigh heuene.
16.103-104, 109, 117-118

The Passus 16 Life of Christ connects the theme of Christ as healer with Him securing His own safety against the schemes of Satan. Christ as saviour of man and curer of man's "mortal wound" is saved for the Passus 18 Life. The union of all these associations comes when Christ the knight "in Pieres armes humana-natura" cries:

For I, that am lorde of lyf • loue is my drynke,
And for that drynke to-day • I deyde vpon erthe. 18.363-364

Other quotations in the Passus 16 Life of Christ anticipate Christ's victory by mentioning events to appear in the new dispensation. The allusion to the New Law, the law of love, at 16.140 (quoting JOHN 13:14), as well as Christ's bold prediction of the preaching of the Word (16.159, quoting MARK 16:16) create a contrast between the period before Christ's conquest and after it. These suggestions are completed in Passus 18.

H. Boke

According to Maclin Smith[55], the tradition of the Life of Christ in which Langland is working is also represented by the Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ[56]. By comparing the selection of Biblical incidents in these two poems, we see how Langland uses the Life of Christ motif.

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55 Maclin Smith, Piers Plowman and the Tradition of the Medieval Life of Christ, page 201.
56 Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ, edited by Charlotte D'Evelyn (Early English Text Society OS 158, 1921).

The Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ combine the four Gospel sources to form a connected narrative of the Passion. The process of compilation leaves no seams: the independence and identity of the sources is lost. The major departure from this procedure occurs at lines .1704-1734, where Job's complaint is used as a prefigurement of Christ's Passion. The details from Job are applied to the circumstances of Christ's suffering.

Blody and bare I stonde stille
And suffre ȝoure don with me ȝoure wille.
Stille I stonde and harde I wepe
And alle ȝoure harde strokes kepe.
* * *
And in may face þwas so whit
ȝe spatton alle with gret dispyt.
.1713-1716, 1719-1720 quoting JOB 16:13-15 and JOB 30:10

Also quoted are JOB 9:25 (.1721-1722); JOB 19:12-13 (.1725-1726); and JOB 6:12, 7:12 (.1729-1734). After this interlude, the poet continues the narrative with other, better-known foretellings of Christ.

Writ now, loue, prophetes sawes
Þat weron saide by olde dawes. .1735-1736

Langland's central Life of Christ (18.10-430) shows the same eclectic use of Gospel accounts as the Meditations, but demonstrates a different emphasis in dealing with OT types of the Passion. Langland uses the four Gospels freely, and selects vivid details of the physical jeopardy and pain which Christ suffers. Langland mixes the gospel accounts (emphasizing the reactions of the witnesses to the Passion as it unfolds, 18.53-44 and 18.68-70) with material from legends of the Cross (18.51), and the Gospel of Nicodemus

(Longeus, 18.78-91). But there is no attempt to use OT prophecy or imagery to confirm Jesus as the Christ.

At Christ's death, Langland returns to the debate format. He creates a tableaux from the scriptural image of the four daughters of God[57]:

Merci and treuthe metten hem silf, riȝtwisnesse and pees weren kissid. (PSALM 84:11, FM)

The use of this verse in this context is conventional, but its placement is unusual. The debate between justice and mercy has been the controlling image since the pardon scene. Langland chooses to make it explicit just before Christ's victory to emphasize that it is the Resurrection that resolves all contradictions. But before we come to that victory, there is interposed the episode of Boke[58]. Just as all the other issues are now hinged upon Christ, so Boke embodies the process of scriptural allusion, and links it irrevocably to Christ.

Boke's purpose is to provide incontrovertible testimony to Christ's divinity. Boke addresses the task with two kinds of evidence; that of man and that of nature. The "welkyn" (18.237), water (18.240), sun (18.243), earth (18.244-245), and hell itself (18.247) are brought forward as witnesses. Their sequence summarizes the history of

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57 Hope Traver, "The Four Daughters of God," PMLA 40, (1925), page 44-90.

58 Robert Kaske, "The Speech of 'Boke' in Piers Plowman," Anglia, 77 (1959), 117-144, is a complete explication of the possible implications of this character. The later article by E. Talbot Donaldson, "The Grammar of Book's Speech in Piers Plowman," in Blanch, Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman, 264-270, gives a more likely interpretation of the meaning of lines 252 to 258.

Christ's Incarnation (from Birth to Descent into Hell). But man also witnesses. First, "alle the wyse of this worlde" (18.232), the Magi; then Peter (18.242), first of the Disciples; then "Symondes sones" (18.248), as first fruits out of hell; they all recognize Christ as Lord.

Kaske suggests that Boke's speech

> "embraces characteristic information from both Old and New Testaments; ...."[59]

Kaske's comment fails to account for the absence of the traditional prophetic material from the OT. Boke does not rely on either prophecies or events from the OT to substantiate Christ's claim. Instead he suggests a different relation between Christ and the OT, by offering only an obscure allusion, that of Gygas the Giant[60] from Psalm 18.

The use of Job and prophecy by the author of the Meditations was an attempt to persuade the reader of Christ's divinity. The graphic details from Job are striking evidence which all can see. Gygas communicates nothing to the uninformed reader. The purpose of the allusion is not to prove Christ from the OT, but to characterize Boke: he is "the Old Testament in light of the New". His ability to read an obscure reference in Psalms as a record of Christ is a part of that "revealing of all things" which is now impending. Boke, standing for a

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[59] Robert Kaske, "The Speech of 'Book' in Piers Plowman," page 131.
[60] Robert Kaske, "Gigas the Giant in Piers Plowman," JEGP, 56, (1957), 177-185.

renewal of the meaning of the OT with the coming of Christ, both predicts and depends upon Christ's coming victory.

> "Once the negative condition 'but Jesus rise' has been stated, the rest of Jesus' action becomes, in Book's mind, inevitable ...."[61]

Boke's iconography also specifies that he is the imminent teaching and preaching of the Good News; not simply the New Testament, but the coming of the Gospel. His "two brode eyen" (18.228) probably refer to Revelation: the Book of Life "writun with ynne and with out" (APOC 5:1, FM); the four beasts "ful of iȝen bifore and bihynde" (APOC 4:6, FM); and the Lamb with "seuene iȝen, whiche ben seuene spiritis of God, sent in to al the erthe" (APOC 5:6, FM). Being "a bolde man of speche" (18.229) meets with Paul's approval:

> And Ysaie is bold, and seith, Y am foundun of men that seken me not; Y apperide to hem, that axiden not me. (ROM 10:20, FM)

Boke shares Isaiah's limitation of being "before the time"; his testimony is all the more powerful for that. His oath "by Godes body" (18.230) and his confident prediction:

> And I, Boke, wil be brent • but Iesus rise to lyue 18.252

are meant to suggest Paul's conviction:

> And if Crist roos not, oure preching is veyn, our feith is veyn. And we be foundun false witnessis of God, (1 COR 15:14-17, FM)

These details in Boke's portrait and testimony show him both committed to and empowered by Christ. Boke is the

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[61] E. Talbot Donaldson, "The Grammar of Boke's Speech in Piers Plowman," in Blanch, Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman, page 269.

culmination of the use of scripture in the poem; he testifies to Christ, and indicates that Christ alone makes testimony possible.

I. Redde Quod Debbes

The last two passus of the poem have seemed to some critics to countermine the achievement of the first 18. Priscilla Jenkins goes to far as to say that Passus 20 even destroys the fictional premises of the poem:

> "By the end of the poem the (allegorical) mode has been so strained that 'perfect' characters behave inconsistently."[62]

It is true that the hypocrisy of the false characters of Passus 20 is not relieved by scriptural references which define and judge them (as was the case with the Seven Deadly Sins in Passus 5). However, attention to the theme quotation of Passus 19 will explain this situation.

Wille's first teachers introduced the theme of rendering one's due. It expressed man's essential duty as creature to his creator. The scriptural expression of this idea is MATT 18:28, redde quod debbes, "Ȝelde that thou owest" (FM). In Passus 19 it is repeated thrice in important contexts. First, when Christ's Resurrection is confirmed by all the apostles, including Thomas:

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[62] Priscilla Jenkins, "Conscience: The Frustration of Allegory," in Hussey, Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches, page 142.

And whan this dede was done • Dobest he tauȝte,
And ȝaf Pieres power • and pardoun he graunted
* * *
To Pieres pardon the Plowman • redde quod debes.
Thus hath Pieres powere • be his pardoun payed,
To bynde and to vnbynde • bothe here and elles-where,
And assoille men of alle synnes • saue of dette one.
19.177-178, 182-185

The pardon from Treuthe has been sealed by Christ, and Piers in Peter's office offers salvation. The final payment by Christ is assured:

He went, and woneyth there • and wil come atte laste,
And rewarde hym ryȝte wel • that reddit quod debet
19.187-188

Second, before Grace gives Piers the gospels, the writings of the Fathers, and the Church on earth, he teaches:

Loke that none lakke other • but loueth alle as bretheren.
* * *
For I make Pieres the Plowman • my procuratour and my reve,
And regystrere to receyue • redde quod debes.
19.249, 253-254

Resoun counselled the sinners to return ill-gotten goods to the bishop (5.287-299); now the larger debt man owes God must be payed through the Church. Third is Conscience's invitation to the Lord's Supper to:

' ... tho that hadde ypayed
To Pieres pardoun the Plowman • redde quod debes.'
* * *
That vche man forȝyue other • and that wyl the paternoster,
Et dimitte nobis debita nostra, etc. 19.387-388, 392

Man must treat man as God has treated him:

and forȝyue to vs oure dettis, as we forȝyuen to oure dettouris; (MATT 6:11, PM)

The Middle English Sermon on MATT 18:28[63] offers several points of comparison with Piers Plowman, and can help explain the purpose of this reiterated quotation in Passus 19. The sermon elaborates the injustice of the unmerciful debtor:

> þou askeþ mercy and God forȝeues þe; but when God hase forȝeue þe, þan þou ... takeþ vengeance and parauntur will neuere forȝeue [on of þin seruantes]. Weneþ þou, man, for to haue mercye of God? Nay, forsothe, for how seiste þe in thi Pater Noster? "Dimitte nobis debita ...." (page 37, lines 8-16)

God's action is expressed in a temptingly ambiguous way. He forgives us, so we must forgive others; we do not forgive, therefore, can we expect Him to forgive us? However, the sermonist does not pursue this issue to a conclusion, rather, he resolves the ambiguity. The preacher (like Langland) uses Psalm 18 as a opportunity to contrast mercy and justice. But at the end of the sermon we are assured that man, undeserving though he is (in condition a servant unable to pay his bond) is finally forgiven.

> þan þis counselere com downe with þe second persone in Trynite and lafte Ryghtwisnes and Trouthe aboven with þe Fadur and þus by ys mercye bouȝthe man aȝeyn vn-to is herytage, þe wiche is þe blisse of heven, þat he loste be-cause of synne. (page 45, lines 16-20)

In Piers Plowman the sequence of ideas is different. As man is given the supports of faith through Grace in Passus 19, he is repeatedly reminded that he must respond to God's initiative. At 19.393 the field of folke is left on their own, though now with a great storehouse of assistance

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[63] "Reddis quod debbes," Middle English Sermons, number 8, edited Woodburn Ross, (Early English Text Society OS 209, 1940), 36-45.

available to them if they choose to use it. Langland's pessimistic verdict is that mostly, men do not so choose.

'ȝe, bawe!' quod a brewere • 'I wil nouȝt be reuled, 19.394

There is virtually no scriptural allusion from here to the end of the poem. The populace must rely on their own recollection and interpretation of what they have heard and understood to secure their salvation. Scriptural authority stands silent and awaits man's response to God's initiative.

V. The Centrality of Scripture

Criticism of Piers Plowman has frequently touched on the issue of scriptural exegesis. The question has been raised, to what extent do the methods and assumptions which underlie allegorical readings of scripture apply to Piers Plowman? Proponents[64] assert that the methods of Biblical exegesis can (in fact, must) be applied to medieval literary works. Opponents[65] contend that this is true only in limited ways and for specific contexts, not the entire body of a work like Piers Plowman. In this chapter I will survey a few works which discuss the role of the Bible, and explain the purpose and aims of allegorical or supra-literal interpretation. This survey will show that the controlling idea of allegorical interpretation is the centrality of the Bible to the Christian life, and it is to secure this status for the Bible that allegorical methods are used to explain it. Langland participates in this tradition by according the Bible the highest position of authority in his poem; the suggestion of four-levels of meaning in his poem are inappropriate.

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[64] See Charles Donahue, "Patristic Exegesis in the Criticism of Medieval Literature: The Summation," in Bethurum, Critical Approaches, 61-81; and D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, (Princeton University Press, 1962). David Aers, Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory (New York:St. Martins Press, 1975), applies the question to Piers Plowman.

[65] E. Talbot Donaldson, "Patristic Exegesis in the Criticism of Medieval Literature: The Opposition," in Bethurum, Critical Approaches, 1-26.

Beryl Smalley has been the most assiduous chronicler of the Bible in the Middle Ages[66]. Her book conveys a vivid sense of the huge scope and the monumental human effort involved in Bible scholarship before 1500. She says "the Bible was the most studied book of the Middle Ages[67]". The changing currents of literal and allegorical interpretation are but the surface ripples of this profound enterprise.

Historically, the critical question of Biblical interpretation, "What does the Bible mean?", was set by the early Church's decision to retain and respect the Jewish scriptures as well as the still-growing corpus of Christian writings[68]. The elementary problem is the relation of the two Testaments. The evangelium testifies that everything points to Christ, awaited Christ, declares Christ. Therefore Christ must be the point of departure for a right reading of the Gospels, of the NT, and ultimately of the OT as well.

The principles proposed by Augustine in De Doctrina Christiana (Christian Instruction)[69] are basic, and were never abandoned in the many later attempts at elaboration. The study of the Scriptures is the crowning task and achievement that harmonizes all knowledge, philosophy, arts,

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[66] Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952); "The Bible in the Middle Ages," in Nineham, The Church's Use of the Bible, 57-71. The studies by Henri di Lubac explain the influence and importance of Bible scholarship in the Middle Ages.

[67] Beryl Smalley, Study of the Bible, Introduction, page xi.

[68] Henry Chadwick, "The Bible and the Greek Fathers," in Nineham, Church's Use of the Bible, 24-39.

[69] Augustine, Christian Instruction, translated by John J. Gavigan (Catholic University of America Press, 1950).

and skills. The study of scripture is the peak of learning, for which practical studies and a knowledge of facts and languages are but the preliminary. The structure of Augustine's Christian Instruction shows clearly the Bible is the centre of man's life. In Book 1 are the central texts of faith, drawn from the NT. Book 2 is a scheme of study which will prepare the student for reading and explaining scripture. Book 3 is a summary of scripture, accounting for the several ways in which it can be obscure and confusing. Augustine gives examples of his own exegetical practice, including allegorical explanations of some Bible texts and guides to interpretation. Book 4 reaps the fruits of study, which are teaching and preaching the Gospel.

The purpose of study is to learn how to obey God:

> "A man who fears God carefully searches for His Will in the Holy Scriptures."[70]

Knowledge of God comes from the Bible, but many parts of scripture are obscure, and can only be understood in light of what is clear from other parts. There is a hierarchy of meaning in the Bible, in which allegory immediately takes its appointed place. The first norm of expounding scripture is belief.

> "Whoever refers his whole comprehension of Sacred Scripture to faith, hope, and charity, may approach the interpretation of those books fearlessly."[71]

Texts which plainly state the saving truths will be prized as evidence of God's generosity to man for allowing His Will

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[70] Augustine, Christian Instruction 3.1, page 117.
[71] Augustine, Christian Instruction 1.40, page 60.

to be known. Texts which contradict these truths will be expounded allegorically (given a second sense); they will be prized for their obscurity, which taxes man's ingenuity, humbles his pride, and impresses on him the mystery of God's ways. For Augustine the key to scripture, the watershed between what is literal and what must be allegorical, is charity. He insists the commentator

> "understand as figurative anything in Holy Scripture which cannot in the literal sense be attributed either to an upright character or to a pure faith. Uprightness of character pertains to the love of God and our neighbour; purity of faith, to the knowledge of God and our neighbour."[72]

The emphasis on the carnality of the literal, and the need to rise above it, comes from a conviction that the Bible teaches charity and love, and that an interpretation which contends that the Bible teaches otherwise is a self-centred attempt to escape from the consequences.

> "It is a wretched slavery of soul, indeed, to be satisfied with signs instead of realities, ..."[73]

St. Edmund Rich mentions the same criteria when he tells the unlearned man how he can profit from Holy Writ. Whatever you hear of the Bible

> "in sermone or in priue collacyone, take kepe als tyte if þou here oghte þat may availle þe till edyfycacyone, to hate syne and to lufe vertue, ... ffor ef þise twa gudnes es all that es wretyne in preue or in apperte."[74]

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[72] Augustine, Christian Instruction 3.7, page 129.
[73] Augustine, Christian Instruction 3.5, 124-125.
[74] St. Edmund Rich, The Mirror of St. Edmund, in Perry, Prose and Verse, page 22.

Piers Plowman owes something to both the structure and strictures of Christian Instruction. The long process of education Wille undergoes in Passus 8 to 18 conforms with Augustine's scheme of study, culminating with the revelation of Christ and the spreading of the gospel. Some of Langland's particular scriptural interpretations also come from Christian Instruction. Augustine refers to Christ: "He is both the physician and the medicine" (1.14). Langland uses this image repeatedly. Langland's adaptation of the Good Samaritan parable in Passus 17 follows Augustine, who says:

> For the Lord Jesus Christ meant that He Himself was the one who gave help to the man laying half-dead upon the road, beaten and left by the robbers. (1.33)

Most significant is the allusion which pertains to the principle of reading texts allegorically which otherwise contravene charity. Augustine explains Paul's ungenerous quotation of PROV 25:22 in ROM 12:20 by saying

> The coals of fire are the burning lamentations of repentance by which that man's pride is healed and he grieves that he has been an enemy of the man who relieves his misery. (3.24)

Langland uses the quotation in just this sense as his theme text as he expounds "love your enemies":

> Cast coles on his hed • and al kynde speche;
> Bothe with werkes and with wordes • fonde his loue to wynne;
> * * *
> And but he bowe for this betyng • blynde mote he worthe!
> 13.144-145, 148

The Didascalicon of Hugo of St. Victor has different purposes, different definitions, and a different treatment of the arts than Christian Instruction. But like Augustine,

Hugo presents scripture as the culmination of study, the source of theology and ethics, "the peak of philosophy and the perfection of truth"[75].

The question of what was to be included in the literal received different answers[76]. Augustine included in the literal everything that our knowledge of the writer's historical and intellectual context would permit us to attribute to him[77]. Bede, rather, explains that the allegorical meaning included figures of speech and tropes of all kinds (irony, enigma, sarcasm, proverb, and antiphrasis)[78]. Hugo of St. Victor speaks of exposition and understanding as separate things. The first included three things: the letter, the sense, and the deeper meaning. The letter is the construction, or the grammatical properties of the text. The sense is the plain first meaning of the text. Allegory or spiritual explanation digs down to a hidden and rich deeper meaning. The rule of charity protects the discovered meaning:

> "The divine deeper meaning can never be absurd, never false."[79]

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[75] Hugo of St. Victor, Didascalicon, translated by Jerome Taylor (New York:Columbia Univerity Press, 1961). Taylor discusses the comparison between the two works in the preface, 28-32. The quotation is from Hugo's Expositio in Hierarchiam caelestrem, given on page 35.

[76] See Beryl Smalley, "The Bible in the Middle Ages."

[77] Augustine, Christian Instruction 1.36, says that even misinterpretation of an author is judged by the rule of charity; although error is to be avoided for the bad habits it keeps.

[78] Bede, "Concerning Figures and Tropes," translated in Miller and Prosser, Readings in Rhetoric, 96-122.

[79] Hugo of St. Victor, Didascalicon 6.10, page 148.

Sometimes there will be just letter and sense; sometimes just letter and deeper meaning (the plain sense seems impossible or illogical); sometimes all three. Hugo says

> "first of all, it ought to be known that Sacred Scripture has three ways of conveying meaning -- namely, history, allegory, and tropology."[80]

History covers matters of fact, and is literal; allegory and tropology arise from the deeper meanings. In expounding these latter two "it is necessary that you not presume upon your own opinion."[81] To guide the reader, Hugo gives an elaborate structure in which doctrines such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, and man's free will are the foundation blocks of allegorical interpretation.

Honorius of Autun uses the figure of an exile's return home to explain man's return to God[82]. Again, knowledge of the classics, the arts, rhetoric, grammar, the natural world, are but preliminary stages on the path; the shelter and rest for man is provided by Sacred Scripture:

> "four kinds of intepretation ... form the four walls. ... The historical interpretation simply expounds the event as it is; thus, Jerusalem is a city in which the temple was located. An allegory is the application which uses one thing to represent another; for example, Jerusalem represents the Church, and we ourselves are symbolized by the Temple of the Lord. Typology is the moral intepretation; according to this, Jerusalem is any faithful soul, ... The anagogical sense is a transcendental application, relating directly to God and to eternal life, ..."[83]

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80 Hugo of St. Victor, Didascalicon 5.2, page 120.
81 Hugo of St. Victor, Didascalicon 6.4, page 144.
82 Honorius of Autun, Concerning the Exile of the Soul and Its Fatherland, translated in Miller and Prosser Readings in Rhetoric, 198-206.
83 Honorius of Autun, The Exile of the Soul, 204-205.

This is the same treatment of the multiple senses as Dante gives in the Letter to Can Grande[84].

Allegorical interpretation is not a process which can be indiscriminately applied to any text, nor an intellectual game or recreation. Augustine allows it for those parts of the Bible that cannot be satisfactorily explained literally. For Honorius it is both the path and the destination for us as we make our way toward our true spiritual home. For Hugo, exposition of scripture contributes to our knowledge of God in three ways.

> "You have in history the means through which to admire God's deeds, in allegory the means through which to believe his mysteries, in morality the means through which to imitate his perfection."[85]

Dante never speaks of allegory apart from the Bible; the most reasonable interpretation of his theory and practice emphasizes that his poetic allegory always depends upon scriptural constructs[86].

These conditions and limits apply quite well to the presence of allegorical exposition in Piers Plowman. Parts of the poem are literal "personification" allegory[87], and do not require another level of allegory. This literal level is not characterized by secularity or carnality, but by being plainly compatible with Christian charity. But Piers Plowman is frequently dark, and often what is said and done

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[84] Dante, "Letter to Can Grande," in Haller, Literary Criticism, 95-111.
[85] Hugo of St. Victor, Didascalicon 6.3, page 138.
[86] Charles Singleton, "Dante's Allegory," Speculum, 25 (1950), 78-86.
[87] Robert Frank, Jr., "The Art of Reading Medieval Personification Allegory," ELH, 20 (1953), 237-250.

requires explanation. We have already seen how often reference to a scriptural quotation or allusion supplies this explanation. Langland uses the Bible as a second or supra-literal level of allusion for the images and activities in his poem. Rather than imagining four-fold levels of meaning living an independent life in Piers Plowman, we have rather been looking at a poem which constantly points to the many levels of meaning in the Bible. The imagery and symbols of Piers Plowman are always working at just one remove from their scriptural prototypes. In this sense Piers Plowman is a second and derived sensus which points to the sentence of scripture.

Allegory, we have seen, is a way of accommodating what Scripture says to what God has said. Criticism which treats Langland's allegory as a purely intellectual or affective device for conveying abstract ideas does not account for what the poem is. David Aers' book Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory is an example of this approach. For Aers allegory is a kind of cryptic puzzle with only one right answer. For example, speaking of the use in the Mass of the story of Christ going to Martha's house as a figure for the Incarnation, Aers comments:

> "It is extremely doubtful whether this makes the doctrine of the conception of Christ more intelligible."[88]

The comment assumes that allegory is a device for making ideas clear; but as the obscurity of Piers Plowman

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[88] David Aers, Christian Allegory, page 37.

testifies, this is not the primary purpose of the allegorical medium. We can say of Langland's use of the Bible what Beryl Smalley said of Stephen Langton's allegory:

> "its function is to confirm certain well-established truths, and is acceptable only so far as it agrees with these."[89]

The best analogy for Langland's use of scripture is the figural relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Henri de Lubac says this relationship, typology, was the key fact of the exposition of the Bible in the Middle Ages.

> "The Old Testament reveals the mysteries of the Cross, but they are in turn revealed by it, and it alone."[90]

The OT predicts, and prepares for Christ. Christ, in turn, fulfills, makes perfect and complete, all that the OT intimated. Elizabeth Salter recognizes the implication of this figural world view for art:

> "For in all typological or figural art, the acts to which all else must be referred are the acts of Christ's life; ...."[91]

There are particular cases in Piers Plowman where scriptural quotations are used with their overburden of special allegorical associations (for example, Gigas the Gyaunt in Passus 18); without the key to the traditional interpretation, the allusion will be lost. These are the small minority of Bible quotations in the poem, however.

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[89] Beryl Smalley, "Stephen Langton and the Four Senses of Scripture," Speculum, 6 (1931), page 76.
[90] Henri de Lubac, The Sources of Revelation (New York:Herder and Herder, 1968), page 35.
[91] Elizabeth Salter, "Medieval Poetry and a Figural View of Reality," Proceedings of the British Academy, 44 (1968), page 79.

Langland's use of scripture builds up to the vision of Christ in Passus 18 and 19, which is the heart of the poem[92]. Langland's creation of Piers as a partial alter-ego for Christ suggests a reticence: Christ is at the foundation of so much in the poem that it is only with caution that Langland brings him forward into the surface action. Wille undergoes a purification before he can encounter Christ Himself, and he is introduced to the effects (the Christian life in all its forms) before he meets the Cause.

The figural approach is more interested in the way Christ shapes and fulfills the types of Him, than in how effective the types are in telling us about Christ. Christ is the given; the rest is elaboration. This view of the Bible explains Langland's insistent use of it as a ground of authority, its suggestive application in the gradual revealing of Christ, the crucial placement given to testimony of Christ's life, and even its final falling silent to listen for man's answer to Christ's appeal.

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[92] Mary Davlin, "Kynde Knowyng as a Major Theme in Piers Plowman," RES, ns22 (1971), 1-19, brings out the "centrality of Christ" in the poem better than her more suggestively titled "Piers the Plowman as 'The Whole Christ'," Chaucer Review, 6, 280-292.

VI. The Scriptural Tradition

So far we have looked incidentally at some literature contemporary with *Piers Plowman*, to create a contrast by which Langland's method will be clearly seen. To finish this summary I have selected a few works to compare with *Piers Plowman* to round out the exploration of the ways scripture is used in the poem.

A. The Psalter

Langland's use of the Psalter[93] can be best dealt with in the context the fourteenth-century English Psalter. This work exists in at least three printed versions[94]; their contents exhibit a well-defined subset of the Bible. All three give the 150 Psalms and a body of other lyrical passages from the Bible, including: ISA 12, ISA 38, 1 REGUM 2:1-10, EX 15:1-19, HAB 3:1-19, DEUT 32:1-43, and LUC 1:46-55. The *Salisbury Psalter* and the *Earliest English Prose Psalter* include DAN 3:57-88, LUC 1:68-79, the Te Deum, LUC 2:29-32, and the Athanasian Creed. The *Salisbury Psalter* adds the Pater Noster (MATT 6:9-13) and the

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[93] Langland's use of the Psalter was evaluated by Greta Hort, *Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought*; and by Robert Adams, "Langland and the Liturgy Revisited," *Studies in Philology*, 73 (1976), 226-284.

[94] Richard Rolle, *The Psalter or Psalms of David*, edited by H. R. Bramley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886); *The Salisbury Psalter*, edited by Celia and Kenneth Sisam (Early English Text Society OS 242, 1959); and *The Earliest English Prose Psalter*, edited by Karl D. Bulbring (Early English Text Society OS 97, 1897).

Apostles' Creed.

The Psalter is the most used book in Langland's Bible. However, Langland does not use the lyric literature associated with the Psalms in these three Psalters. His quotation from the above mentioned group includes only EX 15:4 (at 2.181) and HAB 3:11 (3.327); and in these cases, unlike the Psalters, he does not refer his quotations to specific "songs": they are part of a larger fabric. Langland's quotation from LUC 1:52 (15.514) and LUC 1:55 (16.239, 242) do not owe anything to this defined lyrical group either.

Langland's fondness for the Psalter has long been taken to be evidence of his clerical background or vocation[95]. The evidence for this is circumstantial; Robert Adams[96] shows that only a few quotations in Piers Plowman can be definitely traced to the Brevarium or Missal. More to the point is a tradition, clearly articulated in Rolle's commentary, that makes the Psalter a microcosm of the whole Bible. Langland's consistent use of the Psalms as key texts in Piers Plowman accords well with Rolle's interpretation of the book:

Grete haboundance of gastly comfort and ioy in god comes in the hertes of thaim at says or synges deuotly the psalmes in

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[95] M. Ray Adams relied on this sort of evidence in his investigation of Langland's station in life. The major use made of this "professional" knowledge of scripture is critical attacks on clergy who do not know their own foundation--the Bible. For example, at 12.188-191 the priest's knowledge of the 'neck-verse' is contrasted with his ignorance of the real saving sense of the Bible.

[96] Robert Adams, "Langland and the Liturgy Revisited," Studies in Philology, 73 (1976), 266-284.

louynge of ihu crist. (Prologue, page 3).

In thaim is so mykill fayrhed of vndirstandyng & medicyne of wordes that this boke is cald gathen closed, wel enseled, paradyse ful of all appils: (Prologue, page 3)

Rolle everywhere interprets the Psalms in light of, and pointing to, Christ. He introduces this broad reading in the first Psalm:

In this psalme firste he spekis of crist & of his folouers, (1:1)

Langland's reliance on the Psalter indicates a similar view: a certain concordance of interpretation naturally follows. Two of the important early quotations in Piers Plowman, PSALM 14 and the 'toure' of PSALM 60:3, which set the dream landscape through which Wille passes, bear a similar weight of meaning in Rolle's exposition. PSALM 14 is the question of who is for, who against, Holicherche.

The prophet for he saghe many that wenes 'that thae ere wele', and that thai sall come til heuen and sall noght, he askis god whilke men seruys god her in holy kyrke, (14:1)

Langland's use of the tower as a home for Treuthe seems likely to be an allusion to PSALM 60, which Rolle renders:

Tho ert toure of strenght that is, all manere of sekirnes, and defendis fra the feghtynge of the deuel. (60:3)

Langland's use of the imagery of medicine and healing depends upon an expansion of a verse of the Psalms which he never makes specific. Rolle explains PSALM 84:7 by saying "he gifes his hele til vs that is ihu crest".

The teaching of Holicherche on the imago dei is also found in Rolle's expansion of PSALM 4.

The light of godis face is the light of his grace that

refourmes in vs his ymage, (4:7)

i sall slepe ... pryue fra all the noys of the world. (4:9)

Langland uses this Psalm explicitly in the praise of charity at 15.245-249. It is also the 'patent' that Pees presents in Passus 18 (18.184-185). There are bound to be many similarities in the two works, but these quotations seem to reflect a shared conviction that the Psalter is a guide to the Christian way, and that certain Psalms (particularly Psalms 1 to 7) have an important role to play in expounding that way.

There are of course, differences too. Rolle is a mystic, Langland is not. Rolle is commenting verse to verse; Langland has the freedom of a digressive poem in which to incorporate his quotations and allusions. But they both see the Psalter as a "Bible-in-brief". Failure to understand it, especially failure to see Christ in it, is a metaphor for misunderstanding God's will. This is the signficance of the threat in Passus 10.

Ac there shal come a kyng • and confesse ȝow religiouses,
And bete ȝow, as the bible telleth • for brekynge of ȝowre reule,
And amende monyales • monkes and chanouns,
And putten hem to her penaunce • ad pristinum statum ire,
And barounes with erles beten hem • thorugh beatus-virres techynge,
That here barnes claymen • and blame ȝow foule:
10.317-322, quoting PSALM 1:1 and 19:8-9

The context is apocalyptic, and the quotation which the 'barounes' misunderstand are the first words of the Psalms, the opening of the promise to "crist and his folowers". Their Biblical illiteracy is contrasted with the certainty of their punishment "as the bible telleth".

B. Alliterative Poems

> "Connected with and resembling many other medieval literary forms, it is exactly like no one of them; drawing fully on the great common stock of mediveal religious doctrines and images, it reinterprets and renews what it takes in the light of a highly personal vision, ..."[97]

The resemblances with contemporary poems and the uniqueness of Langland's vision are nowhere better highlighted than in a comparison with alliterative poetry. Wynnere and Wastoure[98] is an earlier poem with many similarities to Piers Plowman. If there were other poems of its type, Langland's audience would be prepared in advance for several of his stylistic features: the dream, the debate of characters, the verse form with its alliterative lines. Let us look at how Wynnere and Wastoure proceed.

Their debate is put on for the reader's benefit, and is given a real life context in the setting of an audience before the king. Both sides use scriptural association to bolster their argument. Wastoure begins by quoting MATT 6:19:

What scholde worthe of that wele, if no waste come?
Some scholde rote, some ruste, some ratones fede. .253-254

Wynnere replies, echoing MATT 24:40 and LUC 17:35:

And for-thi God laughte that he louede, and leuede þat oþer, .286

Both sides can find scripture to support their side of the debate. Wynnere alludes to the humble life of Mary and

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[97] Elizabeth Salter, "Medieval Poetry and a Figural View of Reality," Proceedings of the British Academy, 44 (1968), 73-92.

[98] Wynnere and Wastoure: An Alliterative Poem, edited by Israel Gollancz (Oxford University Press, 1930).

Joseph, as if to say that wealth need not be pridefully displayed (.417-422); Wastoure echoes Christ's threats to the rich (MATT 25:41-46) at .444.

There is not much difference between the two poems in amount or frequency of quotation. Wynnere and Wastoure is about as long as a Passus of Piers Plowman, and its nine scriptural allusions are not too few. Rather, it is the signficance of scripture that is different. Quotation of the Bible is but one of the many rhetorical devices of Wynnere and Wastoure. Exaggeration, repetition, description which exhausts through its inventiveness and pouring on of detail, are also part of the armoury of these two sophisticated debaters. They are not two sides to a resolvable conflict: there can be no end to the poem other than the assignment made by the king; each is sent to an appropriate environment. Separating them is the only solution; like ion and anion, they will inevitably and unceasingly react when they come in contact.

The debates are not of this kind in Piers Plowman. No character is an end in himself. The characters, like the issues they discuss, are constantly melding one into another. New characters appear which roll up previous characters into themselves: Anima explains to Wille that she is in fact most of the important characters he has met since his dreaming began (15.16-43). Scripture in Piers Plowman is an important agency for making this process of "accumulation" move along. By repeating scriptural

quotations, issues are raised again for further discussion and elaboration. A scriptural quotation will suggest a hidden dimension to the debate, or will set the quest on a new track.

In Wynnere and Wastoure, Bible quotation has none of these powers. Wynnere's scripturally suggestive speech at .283-293 has no power over Wastoure. We need only compare the similar arguments and quotations in the dispute between Piers and Hunger (6.233-248) to see the difference. Piers defers to Hunger, and expresses what the reader is meant to feel: that there is an authority, a compulsion, that resides in what the Bible says. Without access to this resource, Wynnere and Wastoure resort to sheer volubility:

Let be thy cramynge of thi kystes, for Cristis lufe of heuen! .255

With The Parlement of the Thre Ages[99] we come to a work which quotes the Bible several times, but without according it a special status. a work of special status. The author translates everything in his narrative to his contemporary reality: Greek, Jew, and Christian, before and after Christ, are all dressed in the garb of his day and age. Here is Joshua, one of the nine worthies:

The firste was gentill Iosue þat was a Ieue noble,
* * *
Than Dauid the doughty, thurghe Drightynes sonde,
Was caughte from kepyng of schepe & a kyng made.
The grete grym Golyas he to ground brougte,
.426, 442-444

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[99] The Parlement of the Thre Ages, edited by M. Y. Offord (Early English Text Society, OS 246, 1959).

Solomon is one of the four "wyseste in the worlde of Witte":

Than Sir Salomon hym-selfe sett hym by hym one;
His Bookes in the Bible bothe bene to-gedirs;
* * *
And he was the wyseste in witt that euer wonnede in erthe,
.597-598, 603

The pleasure in reading The Parlement of the Thre Ages is admiration for the narrative ability of the author; the three debaters are carefully drawn, and the stories related (especially those by Old Age) are brisk and concisely told.

The poem ends with a set piece of scriptural quotation; three triplets which advise a turn from vanity and sin to repentance. ECCLES 1:2 (.638-640), JOB 7:9 (.641-643), and LUC 17:14 (.644-646, .647-649) are quoted. The translation and application of the quotations are apt, but this use of scripture seems artificial and is isolated from the rest of the poem.

C. Religious Instruction

We can also compare Piers Plowman with a work written for a different audience; Speculum Christiani[100]. This is a translation of basic material of religious instruction, intended for preachers and teachers. It shares several topics with Piers Plowman. Its use of the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, the "four philosophers"[101], and a

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[100] Speculum Christiani, edited by Gustaf Holmstedt (Early English Text Society OS 182, 1933).
[101] A line from the "Sayings of the Four Philosophers": "gifte is domesman and gile is chapman" is echoed in Piers Plowman at pr.64.

sermon on wisdom all have counterparts in Piers Plowman.

There is a signficant difference in the way in which the Bible is used in the two works. For the translator of the Speculum, the Bible exists as a collection of separate authorities. His reliance on authority is exhausting; everything he says is supported by quotations from the Fathers, Church writers, or the Bible. For example, introducing the Ten Commandments he writes:

In heuen schal dwelle al cristen men,
That knowen and kepe goddes byddynges ten. (page 16)

The authorities follow: "Ecclesiastici VIo, Ambrosius, Idem., Gregorius, Ieronimus, Ecclesitatis XIIo." Throughout the work the books of the Bible are given by their name (or their author's name); a sense of integrity to the Bible is not even hinted at. In a few cases (18.2; 26.25; 33.3, 34.21 and 36.22) the Gospel (Euangelio) is cited as source. There is one reference to the historical context of a Bible quotation:

Therfor seys Criste to Petyr thrys: Fed my schepe. (page 28, line 2)

The rest of the Bible authorities are named: Mathei, Petrus, Paulus, Iacobus, Iohannes III; alongside Ezechielem, Prouerbiorum XVII, Ieremias, and Ambrosius, Ieronimus, Bernardus, Augustinus, and Lincolniensis. The figural sense, which is so apparent in Langland, is absent here. Rather than a hierarchy of meaning (the Old Testament revealed by New Testament, commentary shedding light on but being illuminated by its Biblical referent) his Biblical

quotations are on the same level as later tradition. It is all 'authority', to be given chapter and verse, perhaps for the studious or the curious to pursue.

D. Sermon

We have previously looked at two sermons from the Middle English Sermons collection. One other sermon will confirm what we noticed previously about the method of scriptural allusion in these works. Thomas Wimbledon's Sermon[102] takes LUC 16:2 as a point of departure for inquiring into the states of Christian life. He argues that all men in some way are God's servants, from his theme text "ȝelde rekenynge of þy baylie." (.88) He uses Biblical quotations to develop and round out the distinctions made in the sermon. In speaking of the many 'astaats' God calls men to, Wimbledon gives a string of Bible quotations about vocations: 'laborer, seruant oþer bondman, marchaunt, knyȝt oþer lord, iustise oþer iuge, prest' (.60-76). However, the structure of the sermon and the three classes and the three questions asked each one:

how hast þou entred? The secunde, how has þou reuled? and þe þridde, how hast þou lyuyd? .94-95

do not depend on the Bible for their creation or maintenance.

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[102] "Sermon Preached at St. Paul's Cross, 1388, 'Redde racionem villicacionis tue'," edited by Nancy Owen, Medieval Studies, 28 (1966), 176-197.

Scripture is used as illustration or example; occasionally a quotation is useful to expand a distinction or create new categories: but these quotations do not maintain their Biblical resonances. Wimbledon has a literary perception of the Bible; it explains, but also sometimes needs explaining. Speaking in the second part of the sermon about the two reckonings all men must face, Wimbledon says:

þe first anoon after þe departyng of þe body and þe soule, and þis shal be special, and of þis rekenynge oþer doom speckeþ þe gospel of Luk; þe secunde rekenynge oþer dom shal be anoon after þe general resurreccion, and þat shal be vniuersal, and of þis it is spoke in þe gospel of Matheu. .384-387

When he uses a Joachastic interpretation, he says so:

Also Abot Joachym in exposicioun of Jeremye seyþ: .551-552

Langland never treats the Bible from this kind of critical perspective. For him, scriptural quotation can be used to preach or perplex, but he never permits an objective view of his source of authority. When using several strands of scriptural exposition, he jumbles them together with an eye to an impressionistic image. For example, dealing with the apocalyptic quotations used by Wimbledon, he combines them (along with contemporary astrological images) to create a startling picture:

He shal awake with water • wastoures to chaste.
Ar fyue ȝere be fulfilled • suche famyn shal aryse;
Thorwgh flodes and thourgh foule wederes • frutes shul faille. 6.324-326

Wimbledon's habit of explicitly referring to the divisions of his sermon and the way they are created out of his theme text also create a different atmosphere for the Biblical quotations. He explains his application of PSALM 15:

> Also oþer wile God sendiþ siknesse and tribulacion to wickid men, and on two causis. First, for þey schulde þe raþere drede God and leue here synne .... Also God sendiþ hem syknesse ofte to agaste oþer men leste þey foleweden here synnes, ... (.450-452, 455-456)

Langland quotes this Psalm in the same context of healing man's mortal wound, but does so in a condensed and obscure way, mentioning only a single word from verse 1:

> Thei shul be clensed clereliche • and wasshen of her synnes
> In my prisoun purgatorie • til parce it hote,
> And my mercy shal be shewed • to manye of my bretheren.
> 18.389-391

Langland's methods tend to make his scriptural quotation definitive and beyond refutation; he does not open the literary or historical context as Wimbledon does, nor does he allow his selective procedures to ever come into plain view.

VII. Conclusion

We have looked at many kinds of reliance on scripture in Langland's poem, and we have seen how the Bible enters the fabric of Piers Plowman at many levels. One last example will help to summarize the effects of Langland's use of the Bible. The broad landscape of Passus 16 to 18 is formed out of three Bible texts: Paul's praise of charity (1 COR 13:13), the parable of the Good Samaritan (LUC 10:29-37), and the "Four Daughters of God" (PSALM 84:11). Within this border move characters which owe various allegiances to scripture. 'Spes' is part of the extended allegory Langland has created here; so are Rightwisseness and her sisters. Abraham appears thanks to his association with faith in Paul's writings. Anima is a character of Langland's invention, but she defines herself in relation to the scriptural issues active throughout the poem. Boke is a character who represents the process which is currently at work; the use of scripture to expound the Christian message. Christ, too, appears, in his own person for the first time in the poem. Yet Langland is careful to describe Christ's nature and meaning in terms which he has earlier created, and which are unique to this poem.

It is this extreme interdependence of poem and source that makes Langland's use of the Bible unique. This contrasts markedly with related literature, even that which has a large quantity of Biblical material. For example, the

poem Cleanness[103] is comprised of three extensive Biblical paraphrases. The biblical material is thematically united around the concept of purity or cleanness. But the author of Cleanness refrains from drawing illustrations from outside the Bible context at hand. Significantly, it is only when speaking of Christ that he ranges through scripture for his quotations.

Langland's Biblical quotations attain an insistent independence through their presentation. They sometimes resolve issues, but other times they distract the argument, dilate it, and multiply distinctions. The Bible is misused by some characters, so quotation of it becomes a matter for exercising judgement; but Wille is also taught the circumstances where prompt obedience is required. Langland's word play juggles the key words of scriptural text in such a way that the primary associations remain intact while the theme becomes a distinctive part of Piers Plowman.

The work most similar to Piers Plowman in these aspects is "A Dialogue Called Holy Pouert", which forms an introduction to Diues and Pauper[104]. Both Diues and Pauper search the Bible to determine which of the two lives is most pleasing to God. Pauper, naturally, has all the best lines, but Diues can respond quoting Salomon (PROV 30:8-9):

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103 Cleanness, edited by J. J. Anderson (Manchester University Press, 1977).
104 "A Dialogue Called Holy Pouert", in Diues and Pauper, edited by Priscilla Barnum (Early English Text Society OS 275, 1976), 51-68.

Lord, seyȝt he, ȝeue me neythir gret rychesse ne beggerye þat I be nought constreynyd be nede to forsweryn myn Godys name. (5.3-5, page 59)

Pauper also quotes on Diues' behalf, and both sides pay attention to the issues raised. In this respect, as well as in the fact that Pauper sways Diues, "Holy Pouert" is like Piers Plowman and unlike Wynnere and Wastoure. The important difference is that (in the two former) the debaters exist within a common ground; Wynnere and Wastoure are mutally exclusive terms which have no point of resolution. In both Piers Plowman and "Holy Pouert" it could be said that the characters are having a dialogue within the Bible, just as much as they are "within" their respective poems.

But as there are similarities, there is also an important difference. In "Holy Pouert", when Pauper has convinced Diues through Biblical quotation that his way is best, he then becomes the spokesman for the Bible's teaching on the issue. In Piers Plowman, as we have seen, Langland does not permit any character to be the representative or embodiment of scriptural authority at the end of the poem. Langland indicates that the crucial importance of Biblical interpretion and application requires that each one of us take up the role of seeker and speaker of God's Word.

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